



Alcohol

Drug use

If your drug use is becoming a problem to either yourself or those around you, there are strategies and tools you can use to get it under control.

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About drugs

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Many Australians use drugs (whether legal or illegal) to relax, socialise, or change the way they feel. Some people are able to use drugs without causing too many health, relationship, or lifestyle problems. But for others, especially people who rely on drugs to cope with mental health problems, drug use can have serious consequences. If you or someone else is worried about your drug use, it might be worth thinking more about whether you have a problem with drugs and what you can do about it.

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If you think you have a problem

All drugs affect people differently, and it's hard to draw a line in the sand where problems begin.

For many people, using drugs regularly could be a sign that there's a problem. Feeling like you need to take more than you used to, to get the same high is often a warning sign. Having strong urges to use, or feeling terrible if you haven't used for a few hours, are other clues that your drug use might be getting the better of you.

A lot of people don't use drugs regularly, but that doesn't mean their drug use is trouble free. Even using drugs occasionally can cause problems like accidental overdose, being injured in an accident, being assaulted, or legal problems. These kinds of problems can affect you whether you use illegal drugs, or misuse legal drugs (like doctor shopping for pain meds). Read more about pain if you think that pain is part of the problem for you.

Even if you don't feel like your drug use is out of control, it might be causing problems in your relationship, or you might notice you're also drinking more than usual. Some people use drugs as a way of coping with unpleasant feelings like anxiety or depression, or to block out painful memories of a horrible experience. Follow the links in the text above for more information about how to manage your feelings without turning to drugs.

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Effects of drugs

Drugs can be categorised into a few different groups depending on the way they affect people. There are stimulants (like nicotine, amphetamines, or cocaine), depressants (like alcohol, benzodiazepines, heroin, or codeine), and hallucinogens (like LSD or psychedelic mushrooms). Cannabis (marijuana) can have similar effects to all three of these groups in one way or another, but as a general rule it is classified as being closest to the hallucinogens.

Different drugs have different effects, different risks, and different consequences both in the short and long term. Some types of drugs you're more likely to get addicted to, some you're more likely to overdose on, and some are more likely to cause serious legal issues if you're caught using them.

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What you can do about it

Self-help

If you think your drug use might be causing you some problems, here are some tips for making decisions about what to do, and ways to start managing your use. For some people, these strategies might be all that is needed. For others, they can be a useful addition to getting professional help.

Get informed

Educate yourself about your drug use. Find out about the health risks, physical and psychological effects of drugs, and potential policing and legal issues. Find out about ways to reduce the harms associated with drug use and about online and local services that are there to help.

Get motivated

It can be helpful to think about what you're getting out of your drug use, as well as what you're missing out on. As with most things, there will be pluses and minuses to your drug use. For example, a plus might be that you feel much more relaxed after smoking a joint, and a minus might be that your girlfriend refuses to speak to you if you've been smoking. Writing these pros and cons down on paper is a really good way to help you see the big picture and make a decision about whether you want to make any changes to your drug use. Knowing where you stand will help motivate you to make changes that last.

Set goals

If you've decided to change, you need to work out what your goal is. Are you trying to cut down a bit, or stop using drugs completely? Your goals should be specific, achievable, and broken down into steps. For example, you might say "My goal is to only smoke a gram of pot a week. I'm going to cut back by one cone a day until I reach that goal". Once you've worked out what you want to do, you can write yourself a contract – this is an important part of starting to change, and will help you stay on track.

Keep track

It's really important to keep an eye on how much and how often you're using drugs. This will help you learn more about when, where, and why you use. Keeping a diary is a good way of keeping track of your drug use, including the financial cost and other problems it causes, and is a good reminder that you need to stick to your limits. It's also a good way of checking your progress towards your goals.

Reward yourself

Don't forget to reward yourself for making changes! Maybe with all the money you've saved by cutting back you can treat yourself to something you've been wanting to buy (like clothes or music), or do (like go out to dinner). It's also good to think about other positive activities you could be doing instead.

Take action: Find enjoyable activities to do instead of taking drugs

Making changes can be hard, but having activities and rewards for yourself can help motivate you to stay on track and reduce your drug use.

Use the Enjoyable and Rewarding Activities tool to identify activities and plan how you will get involved in them. Choose activities you could do instead of taking drugs as well as some activities that you can use to reward yourself.

You can use this tool when you are planning to make changes, once you have already started or whenever you get stuck for ideas for activities.

Improve your general wellbeing

Sometimes people use drugs more than they should when they're worried about other aspects of their life. The tools in the High Res website and app can help you with strategies to deal with stress and manage your drug use

Take Action: Improve your problem solving skills to reduce your drug use

If you are finding it hard to deal with your problems you might begin to feel overwhelmed and turn to drugs to cope.

Use the Problem Solving tool to guide you through a step by step process for tackling day-to-day problems to help you to feel calmer and more in control.

When you're starting out, use the tool to solve a problem that is not too complex. Once you've learned the skills you can start to apply the problem solving approach to all sorts of situations as they arise in your day to day life.

Take action: Build connections with people who will support you to reduce your drug use

If you are planning to reduce your drug use, it is useful to consider who can support you through this process. Your social supports can help you to feel better and cope with stress.

Use the [Social Connections](#) tool to identify the people in your life who can offer you support and the different kinds of support they can offer.

When you're starting out you can focus on strengthening relationships with people who you really trust and can confide in. Spend time with people who want to support you to reduce your drug use.

This tool is also available on the [High Res](#) app to use on the go

Take action: Manage your emotions when you feel like turning to drugs

When you are overwhelmed by strong emotions, it's difficult to think clearly and stick to your goals around reducing your drug use.

Follow the instructions in the [Managing Emotions](#) tool to identify your emotions, regain your composure, think about your situation and decide on a helpful course of action.

When you're starting out, practice using the tool when you are feeling calm. Once you've learned the strategies you can use them whenever you feel yourself becoming overwhelmed or thinking about using drugs.

The Emotional Control tool is also available on the [High Res](#) app to use on the go.

Take Action: Learn to think differently when you feel like turning to drugs

The way that you think influences the way you feel. Thinking in an unhelpful way can make your mood worse and make it more difficult to deal with stressful situations without using drugs.

Use the [Reassessing Your Thoughts](#) tool to help you to identify the thoughts that are causing you distress, and find more helpful ways of thinking.

When you're starting out it's a good idea to apply the helpful thinking tools to a situation that is bothering you but isn't too overwhelming. Once you've learned the skills you can apply them to more troubling situations. With practice, you'll be able to apply these skills day-to-day as situations arise.

This tool is also available on the High Res app to use on the go. Look for Quick Ways to Re-assess your thoughts.

Getting help

Self-help isn't for everyone. If you've tried the strategies above and are still having trouble making changes, or if you feel like your drug use is causing serious problems, you might benefit from getting additional support.

- A GP is always a good place to start when trying to overcome anger problems, as he or she can manage your general health and make referrals for specialists if necessary.
This website has information on a range of professional care that is available to current and
- former serving members
National Drugs Campaign provides information on state-based alcohol and drug services.
- Alcohol and Drug Foundation provides information, resources and programs to prevent alcohol and other drug harm.



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